



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Town and Sheriff's Office Working Together

The Town of Culpeper and Culpeper County Sheriff's Office joined forces this month to help the town cleanup trash and better manage resources to maintain town-owned properties.

In December, town Public Works Director Jim Hoy contacted the Virginia Department of Corrections about the possibility to having an inmate crew from Coffeewood help beautify the town by cleaning up areas. However, the state wasn't capable of helping at that time.

Hoy then turned to Sheriff Scott Jenkins to see if he could provide inmate workers. The new sheriff readily agreed to help. Hoy, Culpeper Sheriff Jenkins and Jail Lt. Shawn Walters quickly came up with a plan.

"I know the process works," said Hoy, who is familiar with the use of state inmate workers, since he was involved with a similar program while serving as the county engineer. "It's good for the inmates and it's good for the locality."

Earlier this month, the first four-man crew of carefully screened jail inmate workers converged on Mountain Run next to Wine Street Memorial Park. For two days, they collected trash, which had accumulated in and on the banks of Mountain Run. Workers removed pallets left behind from the August deluge that saw Mountain Run overflow its banks and flood the surrounding area. The crew also worked in Yowell Meadow Park cleaning up the park. Several dump truck loads of debris and trash were hauled away.

Not just any inmate can qualify for the work details, said Lt. Walters, who supervises the program for the sheriff's office. Inmates must meet several criteria before being assigned to outside assignments.

"We are not putting out child predators or people with protective orders," said Walters.

Inmates who would be spending every day locked up now have an opportunity to work outside beautifying the community, while making time pass more quickly.

To qualify as an inmate worker, jail deputies monitor inmates and help determine who qualifies as a “model inmate.” Those inmates typically have a good record in jail and are respectful to other inmates, jail staff and civilians. In order to participate in the program, inmates must sign an extradition waiver form; if they try to escape to another state, they have already agreed to be extradited back to Virginia. They also have to agree to refrain from breaking laws, making threats or leaving assigned duties, among other rules. There are 13 comprehensive rules inmate workers must agree to before being considered for duties outside the jail.

The inmate workers have one town employee who stays with them, ensuring that they get breaks and have ample time to eat the jail-prepared bag lunch. The town only has to devote one employee to the detail. Having four extra workers essentially produces four times the work of the one employee assigned to supervise them.

“It allows us to use our (town employees) to do other things,” said town Public Works Superintendent Gary Wise. “We have an endless supply of work.”

Without this additional inmate workforce, town employees would have to clean up the debris. But sometimes other projects take priority and picking up debris takes a backseat. In the future, inmate workers could be called on to cut grass and trim bushes, currently tasks typically performed by paid town employees.

“There is considerable work that needs to be done at Fairview Cemetery to bring the cemetery up to park standards,” said Wise, of future plans for inmate workers.

“This is a fine example of municipal governments working together,” said Hoy. It is also a healthy work environment working in the public rather than sitting in jail.”

Hoy estimated that inmate worker program could also save thousands or tens of thousands of dollars.

Sheriff Jenkins concurred with that assessment.

“The Town of Culpeper is part of our county and our intent is to use the inmate workforce for the benefit of the town and county as much as possible,” said Sheriff Jenkins. “We want to continue to work closely with the town, and this is just one way to do that.”

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Attached: 2 photos of Culpeper County inmate workers cleaning up Mountain Run earlier this month.